

REAGAN - INTELLIGENCE
BY MICHAEL PUTZEL
WASHINGTON

President Reagan telephoned former President Carter today to say that Reagan was not trying to blame the Carter administration for the Sept. 20 bombing of the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut, a White House official said.

STAT

The official, who spoke only on condition that he not be identified, quoted Reagan as telling Carter:

"I was not suggesting that you or your administration was responsible for the decline in intelligence-gathering capability and I certainly did not suggest that your administration was the cause of what happened at the embassy in Beirut."

There was no word of any response by Carter, who was at his home in Plains, Ga. The telephone call, which the official described as "an explanation" of Reagan's controversial remarks about the fatal bombing, lasted four minutes.

An outpouring of criticism from Carter, his CIA chief and a host of angry Democrats greeted Reagan's comments in Bowling Green, Ohio, on Wednesday, when he was asked about plans to increase security at U.S. embassies after the third fatal bombing attack against U.S. installations in Lebanon in the past 17 months.

Reagan replied that the United States was "feeling the effects today of the near-destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years, before we came" into office in 1981.

Carter and others accused Reagan of trying to evade responsibility for the latest Beirut bombing. Reagan replied that his remarks were distorted by the news media.

The White House official said Reagan told Carter today that he believed his remarks had been misinterpreted and that he was talking about the "decade-long decline in human intelligence-gathering capability."

The official said Reagan "wanted to be absolutely sure" that Carter understood his position, and that Reagan said he "could understand how Carter misunderstood what the president was saying."

Meanwhile, the administration pressed its request in Congress for \$110 million immediately and a total of \$366 million in the coming year as part of a five-year, \$1.5 billion plan to defend foreign posts against future attacks. Last week's suicide bombing at the new embassy annex in Lebanon killed 14 people, including two Americans.

Continued

2.

Carter, in a statement issued Thursday, said the series of terrorist attacks on Americans in Lebanon "has been brought about by the president's own deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger."

The former president said he has "listened with disappointment and anger" for 3 1/2 years "to a stream of false assertions made by President Reagan in his attempt to blame his every mistake and failure on me and others who served before him in the White House."

Carter said that until now he had not responded out of respect for the office of the president, but Reagan's remark on Wednesday "that his predecessors are responsible for the repeated terrorist bombings of Americans is personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore."

Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale, who was Carter's vice president, said Reagan's remarks "encourages terrorists and our enemies around the world to believe that we don't have an effective intelligence capacity when we do."

Reagan's spokesman, Larry Speakes, said the president did not mean to single out the Carter administration.

Instead, Speakes blamed a decade-long "climate in Congress that resulted in inadequate funding and support for intelligence-gathering capabilities" during both the Ford and Carter administrations.

"Specifically, human intelligence capabilities had been weakened considerably in that decade (the 1970s)," Speakes said.

But retired Navy Adm. Stansfield Turner, who directed the Central Intelligence Agency during Carter's presidency, rejected that contention, saying the only personnel cutbacks were carried out during the Nixon administration to draw down after the Vietnam war and early in Carter's term to "cut some of the bureaucratic fat in the headquarters in Washington."

"And that has improved our intelligence capabilities overseas," Turner said. Under Carter "we did not eliminate one intelligence operative overseas, where you do intelligence work, where you collect information," he added.

The former spy chief charged that Reagan "has done more to damage the CIA than any president in history" by politicizing the agency, naming a director whose personal financial dealings have been questioned and by involving the CIA in activities that have raised questions of both legality and propriety.

The present CIA director, William Casey, Reagan's campaign chairman in 1980, was criticized for maintaining control over his investments after taking office and actively trading stock, at times in corporations that did business with the government. He grudgingly put his investments in a blind trust a year ago, under the threat of congressional action to force him to do so.

"Mr. Reagan, as is so often the case, has got his facts all mixed up," Turner said in responding to the president's remark and Speakes' effort to explain it.

And Speakes, Turner said, "ought to be quartered and hung for this because he's the one who started it."

Continued

3.

The former spy chief recalled that, despite Speakes' denial Thursday that Reagan meant to single out the Carter administration as the supposed culprit, the spokesman himself did just that last year in the wake of the suicide bombing that killed 241 U.S. servicemen at their headquarters in Beirut.

Speakes was commenting then on the report of a special Pentagon commission impaneled to investigate the Marine bombing, which said the United States must improve its undercover spying activities to support military planning and operations.

"We don't quarrel with the fact that the CIA and other intelligence-gathering agencies have been crippled by decisions of the previous administration, and we are in the process of rebuilding (those) capabilities," Speakes said then.

House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., D-Mass., also offered words of rebuke, saying: "President Reagan is getting tangled up in his own excuses.

"For the third time in less than a week he has offered a lame excuse for the third bombing in eighteen months of a major United States facility in Beirut."

Casey, speaking Thursday night before the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, refused to discuss Reagan's statement.

But John A. McCone, who directed the CIA during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, offered an apparent criticism of the Carter administration.

Casey took over the CIA "at the end of the previous administration. Because of attacks that were leveled on it, it was pretty well beaten up. But he (Casey) rehabilitated it," McCone said during his introduction of Casey.

In response to a question from the audience on Reagan's statement, Casey said: "As head of Central Intelligence, I'm very careful to do everything I can to keep myself out of political controversy. So I'm going to pass on that one."